

**Complicating and Contesting Narratives Around Diversity & Equality:
*Economic Immigration and Women***

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Introduction

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The terms economic immigration can trigger multiple associations from the high rolling, risk taking entrepreneur or the jet-setting IT specialist, to the vulnerable, “flexible” migrant worker (Creese, Dyck, McLaren 2008) hired for cheap labour in a plethora of low-paid, low-status occupations. However, when these terms are qualified further by adding women as a key word, the spectrum of images shrinks, as research on female labour migration in the global economy has, to a large extent, “focused on a narrow range of sectors in, particularly, domestic work and sex work” (Raghuram and Kofman 2004: 95).

Granted, in Canada, immigrant women have disproportionately occupied a limited scope of under-valued positions (such as service, domestic or factory work), and they still enter this country through disparaged “dependant” immigrant categories in higher numbers than men (Ng 1993; Arat-Koc 1999; Giles and Preston 2003). Moreover, neoliberalizing global relations of power have affected the “logic of national immigration policies” (Stasiulis and Bakan 2005:13) contributing to this gendered occupational streaming and the precarity of immigrant women’s economic status. “Macro” neoliberal immigration rationales exacerbate gender, race and class inequalities, adversely affecting women’s im/migration experiences, employment opportunities and economic outcomes (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Man 2004; Dauvergne 2008; Abu-Laban 2009).

Nevertheless, some feminist scholarship has illustrated that women are pursuing a wider range of economic migration paths (Preston and Man 1999; Macklin 2002; Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky 2006). Thus, dominant, circumscribed representations of immigrant women not only fail to convey the richness of immigrant women’s economic migration experiences, but also, serve to undercut the scope of opportunities that women seize and shape. Moreover, studies of how various im/migration priorities play out for women at subnational levels are only recently coming to the fore, and still mostly in select contexts (e.g., in Nova Scotia, see Dobrowolsky 2011, 2012; Bryan 2012; or in Toronto, see Buyan 2012). Thus, more comparative work on the interface between “macro” forces and “meso” scale immigration choices, calculations and commitments at the provincial level in Canada, and those of immigrant women at the “micro” scale is required.

This paper attempts to do this by examining how the contemporary experiences of neoliberalism and economic immigration for women are more textured given the growth of economic migration options in Canada, especially with the advent of **provincial nominee programs (PNPs)**. On the one hand, these new immigration routes epitomize neoliberal logics, are highly masculinized (for reasons to be discussed below) and thus have tended to “invisibilize” women (Dobrowolsky 2011). On the other hand, however, by examining three different PNP “meso” contexts (in British Columbia, Manitoba and Nova Scotia) and exploring nominees’ “micro” realities, more complex rationales and varied experiences can be discerned.

For example, while the majority of women who enter Canada through PNPs come as “dependants”, most are professional women who choose to move as wives and mothers. Other women apply to PNP programs as principal applicants (PAs), and they immigrate not only via highly feminized professional sectors, e.g., nursing, but also through male dominated entrepreneurial categories as well. Furthermore, while governments almost exclusively couch PNPs as responding to economic needs,

women nominees, both PAs and dependants, describe multi-faceted migration decision making processes, often placing more emphasis on social as opposed to purely economic drivers.

Consequently, here immigrant women's plural economic identities are featured, and the fact that their gender and class positions are neither singular nor static is emphasized (e.g., see Man 2004; Raghuram and Kofman 2004; Barber 2008). In addition, while recognizing the significant challenges they face in terms of gender, race and class, a comparison and contrast of their strategic calculations and the negotiations involved in these provincial immigration processes, serve to foreground their agency.

The overall aim of this paper, therefore, is to challenge dominant narratives of gendered economic immigration with a more multi-layered approach. The first layer simply involves uncovering immigrant women's diverse economic migration experiences via different PNPs. More fundamentally, the second layer assesses the complex often competing choices and calculations at stake in the three PNPs in question, and how these choices and calculations, in turn, serve to contest leading Canadian equality and diversity narratives. The third layer provides a counter-narrative to immigrant women as merely "victims" of structural forces, by examining their strategic construction and manipulation of material circumstances and identities in ways that challenge sweeping neoliberal portrayals, complicate gender and class norms, and confirm women's agency. Empirical support for this analysis is drawn from three "meso" scale case studies and selected "micro" scale interviews with nominees and provincial officials.

The Theoretical Backdrop, Methodology and Main Argument

This paper is grounded in work that focuses on the multiple roles and realities of immigrant women in the context of globalized capitalism, in general, and within more localized neoliberal regimes, in particular. It reaffirms that the "invisibility of women in international migration scholarship does not correspond to the reality of international migration" and that "the multiple causes of female international migration challenge uni-dimensional analysis of international migration" (Kelson and DeLaet 1999: 13). In the early 2000's Kofman declared: "It is virtually impossible to find much discussion of women or gender relations in studies of skilled international migration" (2000: 46). This can be traced to "trends towards the feminisation of migration [that] have primarily involved unskilled female migration" (Raghuram 2004: 305), but it can also be attributed to a heavy emphasis on economic determinants and a neglect of the social dimension (Kofman 2000: 48) which often serves to bracket out women's experiences. Today "the specificities of the labour markets" in which migrant women are "employed or could move into" (Raghuram 2004: 308) are still less than fully fleshed out and the representations of women as economic migrants often remain problematic as they "tend to foreclose a discussion of multiple class processes engendered by transnational labour migration" (Gibson, Law and McKay 2001: 365).

In contrast, this analysis of women immigrating to Canada through provincial nominee programs highlights their variegated economic backgrounds and experiences, and that these are neither stories of unqualified "success", nor do they reflect women as simply "victims" of a global capitalist economy". By featuring their less than straightforward gender and class positions that are far from singular or static (Gibson, Law and Mackay 2001: 377), the paper underscores the "nimbleness" of immigrant women "in

adjusting their migration strategies” to shape the “shifting priorities of neoliberal citizenship regimes” (Barber 2008: 1268) so as to mesh with their own (mostly socially-oriented) calculations.

The growing marketization of immigration has perpetuated phenomena where immigrant women are typically de-skilled and marginalized (Pratt 1999; Man 2004). And yet, neoliberalism not only plays out differently in terms of gender, race and class, but also, some analysts have traced variations in neoliberalism’s scope and intensity in different places (Bashevkin 1998, 2002), and at different scales (Masson 2006; Conway 2008). Federal systems, for example, can both create and foreclose various opportunities (Sawer and Vickers 2010). Indeed, political opportunities and constraints shift at the “meso” scale, in Canada, between Canadian provinces (Collier 2009), or at the “micro” level when we consider the logics of the different actors involved (Dobrowolsky 2012), rendering neoliberalism more contingent (Dobrowolsky 2009; Jenson 2010) than has been commonly presumed.

The contested interplay of “macro” forces at “meso” and “micro” scales are illustrated in this study through primary sources, secondary studies, and qualitative research in the form of approximately 35 semi-structured interviews conducted in British Columbia (Vancouver, Surrey, Ladysmith), Manitoba (Winnipeg, Steinbach) and Nova Scotia (Halifax) with male and female nominees, government officials and service providers. Close attention paid to the responses of nominees, their motivational factors and tactical considerations both short and long term, reveals not only their fluctuating gendered roles and class positions, but also that women entering Canada through PNPs do so strategically, with social goals that serve to challenge neoliberal, market-driven logics.

This is not intended to diminish the fact that neoliberalism’s gender, class and race dynamics combine in disadvantageous ways. Indeed, as will become apparent, most of the interviewees have endured considerable adversities, including downward class mobility, racialization, and intense familial pressures, producing substantial financial, physical and psychological stress. Rather, the objective is to highlight more diverse economic immigration pathways for women, and to consider their migration decision making “as the exercise of choice (or agency) within a shifting framework of resources and constraints; shifting not only in objective terms in response to changing conditions but also in response to evolving levels of awareness and need” (Ackers 2004: 3). By showcasing their strategic rationales and considering their agency in contexts of both opportunity and constraint, the contention being made here is that immigrant women have ***multiple economic identities that change***, and that can ***challenge, sometimes even disrupt and counter, leading neoliberal and migration narratives***.

Contextualizing Immigration Policy and PNPs

In Canada, although immigration is a jurisdiction shared by federal and provincial levels of government, the federal government has, historically, primarily occupied this field. Federal immigration categories are comprised of economic, family and refugee classes. The economic class is further subdivided into skilled workers (the largest component of the economic class) and business immigrants (Simmons 2010: 93). The latter stream has expanded in recent years and now includes entrepreneurs and investors. Live-in care givers are also part of the economic class. Women are disproportionately found in the live-in care giver category and men are highly represented as business immigrants, entrepreneurs (85.8% in

2009) and investors (83.6% in 2009, CIC 2011: 25). Each stream has principal applicants, who are subject to selection criteria, and “dependants”, i.e., spouses and children, who accompany the principal applicant (PA). Because more women enter as dependants, men are more likely to be considered as “independent” immigrants.

Emphasis on “economic” categories has grown to the detriment of family and refugee classes of immigrants (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Simmons 2010: 92). With the “intensification of economic globalization since the early 1980’s” the strategy has been one of competing for the “best and brightest”, “independent” immigrants and bolstering “Canada’s competitiveness in the global market place with a skilled, fluid and flexible labour force that would provide Canada with a ‘comparative advantage’” (Man 2004: 135-136), exacerbating gender imbalances and occupational segregation, as will be illustrated below.

This economic rationale also bolsters the decision to negotiate intergovernmental agreements between the federal government and the provinces (decentralizing federal authority and delegating it to provinces) thereby enabling provinces to recruit and select immigrants. Since their advent in the late 1990’s, these **provincial nominee programs (PNPs)** have become a hugely important addition to Canada’s economic immigration strategy. They provide new routes for obtaining permanent resident status in Canada which complement federal “independent” categories. Nominee admissions (including PAs and dependants) steadily grew from 477 in 1999, to 82, 45 between 2006-2009 (O’Shea 2009: 18; CIC 2011:19). Indeed, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) forecasted that in 2012 “roughly a third of all economic immigration to Canada will take place through one of these programs (Pandey and Townsend 2010: 20).

At the “macro” scale, PNPs reflect globalization and increased competition for skilled human resources. At the “meso” provincial or local levels, however, PNPs are intended to reduce pressure on federal programs, disperse population across Canada, increase manoeuvrability and respond to more particularized demands (Lewis 2010: 243). PNPs are thus “aligned with the CIC strategic outcome related to the benefits of migration on Canada’s economic development and the broader Federal Government priority related to regional development” (CIC 2011: iv). With PN agreements, provinces can now play a greater role in recruiting, selecting and attracting immigrants based on their labour economic needs. Provinces nominate applicants and these are then ultimately approved by the federal CIC department but this still represents “a departure from a federal immigration policy, as provincial governments play a direct role in setting goals and selecting immigrants” (Carter, Pandey and Townsend, 2010: 1).

Neoliberal themes underpin nominee programs’ economic objectives and how they are operationalized. PNPs are meant to offer a more “flexible” immigration option that will “speed up” processes for successful applicants. They also involve decentralization (from the federal level to the provinces), dispersion (from larger centres to smaller centres), devolution in some cases (from the public to the private sector) and arguably, downloading (of federal government responsibility).

All provinces (except for Quebec) now have PNPs that comprise over 50 different immigration categories with a variety of corresponding selection criteria (Pandey and Townsend 2010: 5). Not

surprisingly, PNPs administrative structures and processes also vary. For example, CIC agreed to shift direct responsibility for settlement and integration services to the provinces of Manitoba and BC, whereas, in most other provinces, these services are administered by local CIC offices and delivered by nongovernmental or service provider organizations (Carter, Pandey and Townsend 2010: 8).

Although research on PNPs is growing, the focus, to date, has mostly been on Manitoba (Clément 2003; Carter, Morrish, Amoyaw 2008; Leo and August, 2009; Carter, Pandey and Townsend, 2010; Lewis 2010) and contains little gender differentiation. In one recent study, a familiar “ideal type” was selected: “Given the characteristics of economic immigrants in general and nominees in particular...we used a single male, 35 years of age, immigrating from Europe and speaking English as our reference” (Pandey and Townsend 2010: 18). To be fair, given the nominee program’s economic orientation, it does constitute a masculinized immigration stream (Dobrowolsky 2011, 2012), and one that can perpetuate a traditional, gendered division of labour (Bryan 2012). Notably, between 2005-2009, 73.8% of PN principle applicants were male and only 26.2% were female (CIC 2011: 22).

And yet, with “meso” and “micro” analyses, women become more visible and and show themselves to be active agents who adopt a range of strategies in negotiating economic immigration routes even when they are, like PNPs, rife with neoliberal and masculinist presuppositions. Unlike the cost/benefit, individualistic rationale of the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject (Rose 1998; Miller and Rose 2008), women’s collective strategies and familial goals factor in both short and long term social and economic exigencies. In other words, women make decisions about migration and careers based on labour market and immigration regulations, as well as social (typically familial) factors, ultimately balancing multi-faceted economic and social wants and needs. Let us now turn to these meso and micro level accounts

THREE PNPs: A STUDY OF CONTRASTS AND COMPARISONS

Manitoba and BC prepared the ground for PNPs in the mid 1990’s, whereas Nova Scotia, with its 2003 PNP start date, was more of a latecomer to the nominee field. Manitoba is viewed as the PNP ground breaker (its first PNP agreement was signed with the federal government in October 22, 1996) and “success” story. Although the BC government officials planned for a PNP early on (i.e., before Manitoba, interviewees BC 1&2), its first agreement was not signed until April 19, 1998, and the BC-PNP launched in 2001 (BC 2011: 2). While BC has been equally “successful” for reasons to be explained below, Nova Scotia’s program has been fraught with difficulties, particularly around its now defunct “economic” stream experiment. Thus, from the outset, a meso level review of MN, BC and NS PNPs reveals substantial variations.

Manitoba’s Provincial Nominee Program’s (MPNP) was initially geared to counter the strong pull of the large Canadian gateway cities (Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver), and the draw of provinces with better economies, jobs and higher salaries (e.g., Alberta). It began with a pilot program aimed at attracting sewing machine operators for Winnipeg’s garment industry (Huynh 2004: 5), which was then broadened “to meet shortages in a variety of ‘skilled worker occupations’ “(Lewis 2010: 243, 245; Huynh 2004: 8) such as trades, manufacturing, health care, construction and farming. The MPNP eventually consisted of five streams: Employer Direct; Family support; International Student; Strategic

Initiative and General, with the latter containing a points system to evaluate potential nominees based on age, education, work experience, language and “adaptability”. By 2003, 3,085 principal applicants and dependents landed in Manitoba with the majority coming from Germany and the Philippines.

Once considered a notoriously “slow growth” province (Pandey and Townsend 2010: 7) with an aging population, Manitoba has used its PNP to reverse these trends. With high numbers in terms of intake, population growth and retention, Manitoba’s PNP is typically heralded as a success story (Carter, Pandey and Townsend 2010: 1; Carter, Morrish and Amoyaw 2008). The MPNP has also been credited with dispersing immigrants from the urban capital of Winnipeg, “settling one-third of nominees...in Steinbach, Winkler, and other rural areas and for boosting business and housing sales and prices in those places” (Lewis 2010: 247). In 2007, nominees accounted for 70% of its total immigration (Pandey and Townsend 2010: 60).

British Columbia provides a dramatically different context in comparison to Manitoba (and Nova Scotia), in that the former receives “the third largest share of immigrants in Canada -approximately 40,000 immigrants each year” (Canada 2010: 3) and, its largest city, Vancouver, is Canada’s second most important (after Toronto) immigrant gateway (see Krahn, Derwing, Abu-Laban 2003). Because BC and Vancouver especially, are renowned immigration “hot spots”, this province has been highly selective with its PNP, and the proportion of its nominee immigration is low. In 2003, there were 441 provincial nominees in total, constituting only 1.5% of all immigrants to BC, as compared to 3,106 and 47.9% in Manitoba, in that same year (Huynh 2004:3).

The BC program was initially comprised of only two streams: Strategic Occupations and Business Category. The latter focused on entrepreneurs, and the former was specifically de-limited as follows: Skilled Workers, with a high priority on aerospace, post secondary education, information and technology; Health Professions (registered nurses recruited through Health Match BC, a recruitment services for health professionals); Business PNs (subdivided into those with experiences in business with high net worth and investment; regional business; and projects); International students; and Other “Restricted occupations: clergy; medium and lower level management, administrative positions, retail, salespersons, hospitality industry jobs, semi-skilled manufacturing and fabrications, helpers in unskilled labour” (Huynh 2004: 9-10). BC, unlike Manitoba, chose not to include a family stream (Carter, Pandey and Townsend 2010: 7). When BC engaged in PNP category expansion, it added a first time business stream, and, from its inception in 2002 to March 2010, the BC government boasted: “571 nominee candidates have been approved, committing over \$600 million in new investment and creating 2,550 new jobs” (British Columbia 2010: 1). In 2010, the 2004 PN agreement was renewed with a flourish of economically-couched accolades. Still, the family stream omission, combined with the specific orientations noted above, help to explain why BC has the second lowest percentage (next to Ontario) of nominees as its share of total immigration (2.6% for BC, 0.3% for Ontario) and why PNs residing in BC (and Alberta) have the highest average earnings in the \$60,000-80,000 earnings bracket, whereas Manitoba’s and Nova Scotia’s PNs’ average earnings are much less, in the \$20,000-40,00 range (CIC 2011: 41). Notably, BC has the highest percentage of PAs with jobs at a skill level that is equal or higher to their intended occupation (BC 2011:45). The BC-PNP “success” thus lies in its exclusivity.

We see more reliance on nominee programs in Nova Scotia than in BC, but still notably less than in Manitoba. Between 2005-2009, the Nova Scotia Nominee Program (NSNP) accounted for 42.5% of Nova Scotia's total immigration as compared to other selected economic immigration categories, whereas the percentage of PNs for BC and Manitoba were 13.5% and 91.2% respectively (CIC 2011: 21). Like Manitoba, the hope was that PNs could remedy NS's demographic ills: out-migration; declining birth rates; aging population; rural de-population; and recurring problems with the attraction and retention of newcomers (Akbari 2009). NS government officials looked approvingly at the "successes" of Manitoba's program, but nonetheless developed their own approach, one that evolved several years after the Manitoba and BC deals were signed.

The 2002 *Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement on Provincial Nominees* established a five year pilot project with the aim of nominating 1000 foreign nationals, and the NSNP was launched in 2003 with three designated streams: Skilled workers; Community identified individuals; and Economic nominees. Two others were added in 2006 and 2007, Family Business workers and International students, respectively. Most recently, in 2010, a new Agricultural Stream was introduced, and major changes to Nova Scotia's immigration plan were announced in the spring of 2011.

In contrast to BC and Manitoba, however, Nova Scotia's economic stream's shortfalls soon became manifest (Dobrowolsky 2011; 2012). Applicants were required to pay a one-time, non-refundable fee of \$130,500 and were matched with Nova Scotia businesses meant to provide a work placement and "mentorship" via a six month middle management employment contract. Yet, nominee target numbers were not met, newspapers reported that nominees were not completing their mentorships (Jackson 2003; Office of Immigration 2005; Office of Immigration 2007a; Office of Immigration 2007b; Refund 2007: A6); and, in 2008, the Office of the Auditor General's (OAG's) two volume report contained a scathing critique of the economic stream and irregularities involved from extreme occupational mismatch to non-existent placements (OAG 2008a; 2008b). Meanwhile, in June 2006, when the government failed to renew the contract of the private enterprise (Cornwallis Corporation) entrusted to administer this public private partnership, Cornwallis launched (November 2006), four law suits against the provincial government arguing defamation, breach of contract and two for financial compensation. Given the fallout, and well before the Auditor General's report, Nova Scotia stopped accepting new NSNP economic category applications in July 2006. Then, in 2007, and again in 2008, in response to nominees' well-organized advocacy for redress, the provincial government announced it would issue refunds (Jeffrey 2007: B1). Nominees' first legal dispute was settled in 2009 (Nova Scotia 2009), and a class action suit was resolved in the fall of 2011 (Nova Scotia 2011).

The foregoing underscores substantial differences at the meso level between nominee programs from their start dates, to their structures and degrees of "success". And yet, one can also discern a few striking similarities that serve to perpetuate inequalities and potentially undermine diversity. Beyond the neoliberal common denominator, PNP principal applicants, overall, are disproportionately male and this is largely the pattern in the three provinces in question. In Manitoba, for instance, 81.4% provincial nominee principal applicants landing between 1999-2003 were male, dropping to 75.6% between 2004-

06. In BC, 68% of nominees were male and in the Skilled Worker sub-category 73% were male (BC 2011:16).

Furthermore, with PNP business sub-categories, the investments required constitute a formidable barrier for women who are less well-endowed in terms of capital/human capital. BC's business category, for instance, initially specified a minimum net worth of \$2 million, as well as the capacity to: make a \$1 million dollar investment; "have a business plan, take an active role in management, and be able to create a minimum of five new jobs" (Huynh 2004: 9). This elevated financial threshold for entrepreneurs is illustrative of why such a category could be seen to work against women. Yet, even in NS, where the capital/human capital requirements of the economic stream were significantly lower (economic stream applicants were to fall between the ages of 25-60 and were required to have: a minimum net worth of \$300,000; experience owning and operating a business; a minimum Grade 12 education with basic skills in English or French; and pay a \$130,500 fee), the percentage of women principle applicants in Nova Scotia's economic category fell well short of the men's (Dobrowolsky 2011). The lower financial requisites for this economic stream still constitute a high bar when gender, race and class are taken into consideration.

Beyond gender and class biases, when we examine the leading source countries for nominees, patterns of racialization appear as well. PNP applications mostly come from the Americas (47.7%) and Asia-Pacific (38.1%), with 9.4% applicants from Europe, and only 4.8%, from Africa-Middle East (in 2009, see CIC 2011: 18). Furthermore, in the three PNP cases examined here, we also see evidence of immigrants from particular source countries being streamed towards certain PNP sub categories. For example, immigrants from the Netherlands were considered to be good bets for Nova Scotia's new Agricultural Stream. Lewis recounts the cultural imbalances and forms of labour segmentation in the Manitoba context where "employer recruitment (a practice encouraged by the MPNP) focuses on particular ethno cultural groups for particular occupations...Filipina nurses, for example...[are] identified as an educated, skilled and adaptable or "desirable" group...Similarly, Chinese and South Koreans are targeted for the business MPNP" (2010: 256). Of course, these preferences also have gendered ramifications because "Nursing is the most feminised of professions and has long been regarded as being one of the most extreme examples of the influence of gender on occupational choice" (Ball 2004:119).

These tendencies re-appear in BC as, on the one hand, the government has staged recruitment missions for businessmen in Korea (in 2003) and Taiwan, China and Singapore (in 2004), and, on the other, it has worked with Health Match BC, mostly in the UK and Australasia, and prints advertisements in *Canada News*, a UK immigration publication, to attract and recruit nurses (Huynh 2004:12; interviewees BC 1, 3 &4). And so, while China, India and the Philippines are the top three source countries for BC immigrants, in general, and the majority of Vancouver's immigrants come from Pacific Rim countries (beyond China, India, and Philippines, Korea and Taiwan are also notable here, see Bauder 2006: 56), the majority of PNs landing in BC have from the UK (17%), China and the Philippines (11% each), US (8%) and Korea (7%) (BC 2011:15). Clearly, then, when attention shifts to the meso scale we see distinctive points of differentiation but also some distressing similarities that call into question Canada's purported equality and diversity.

MICRO COMPLICATIONS AND CONTESTATIONS

When turning to women's economic immigration experiences at the micro scale, leading neoliberal narratives, along with the similarities and differences discussed above, become more complicated. For a start, the narrative of MPNP "success" is troubled further. Consider the story of a woman professional from the Philippines who nonetheless entered through the Family Support Stream of the MPNP after preparing to immigrate to Canada for "decades" (interviewee MN 1, 510). While she had worked as a social worker in the Philippines for eleven years, she still required additional support from her extended family: "we have a savings... in preparation for this application.... [but] because we're a bit, you know we... [were] lacking some amount, so my aunt...[was] able to help us." (interviewee MN 1, 500). Then, upon arriving in Manitoba, MN1 struggled to find suitable work, but this same aunt kept reinforcing that:

especially when you are professional there [i.e., in Philippines] and you are expecting a job here [i.e., in Manitoba] it's really important to remind that you're not going to get your job easily, so any job you should accept it. As long as you have a job and experience, then later you have an option to study and you know if you really want to continue your profession here, you can, but it will take time...Prepare yourself prior to your move here....And I mean psychologically, mentally you have to be prepared (interviewee MN 1, 770).

MN1 reconciled being over-experienced and under-paid, by absorbing these costs and viewing them as part of a larger and longer process that would ultimately benefit her extended family. Despite constrained economic circumstances stemming from de-skilling, MN1 nonetheless fulfilled the expected role of sending remittances to the Philippines to support her mother and brother. As a result, MN1 could not afford regular trips back, but she maintained constant contact by, for instance, phoning her family every week.

Experiences of downward class mobility and de-skilling were common. For example, MN12 held a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications and had worked in the Philippines as an assistant manager in a bank, while her husband had been a supervisor in a company. After immigrating to Winnipeg, MN12 found employment as a receptionist in an immigrant centre, whereas her husband took up work as a general labourer in a factory.

Consequently, despite its purported "successes" in terms of attraction and retention, the MPNP is not without its financial and emotional costs. The MPNP did provide an opportunity to "fast track" immigration; nonetheless, most women noted that many years of planning and family coordination had been involved (e.g., from "decades" to at least six years, interviewee MN2: 910-915). Then, when in Canada, credential recognition became a long term, costly struggle: "And half the time, they've given up nursing careers and everything to come here to find that, you know, they're going to have to pay a fortune to transfer their credentials which is terrible because on immigration paper work it's liked 'look at all these wonderful highly qualified people that we're bringing in that we're not going to let work in their professions'" (interviewee MN 3, 145). These female interviewees' trials and tribulations consequently raise the thorny question of what constitutes success, and for whom?

In certain regards, these can be viewed as classic stories, even immigration clichés. For example, female interviewees of Philippine origin in Manitoba, can be construed as supporting the “heroes and heroines” (Bauder 2006: 32) stereotype of Philippine citizens working abroad in the context of global capitalism. Their experiences also correspond with wider scale patterns where women migrants, in general, enter macro-level of development strategies through the sending of remittances (Sassen 2000: 520).

Read differently, however, these experiences also highlight the diversity of women’s economic migration paths and the less than “cut-and-dried” nature of their gender roles and class identities. For a start, contrary to popular portrayals of “dependant” female migrants, these immigrant women were well-educated, professionals who strategically chose particular PNPs. Migration decisions were made based on multi-pronged calculations from the weighing of costs and benefits at different scales (i.e., federal and provincial level immigration programs) and across different provinces and immigration categories, to an array of family-rooted reasons (to be discussed in more detail below). For instance, some described choosing Manitoba’s PNP because it seemed quicker and easier (interviewees MN 6 and 7: 630). One noted, at the federal level “the timing was long, it was going to take so many years, we thought “God is there any other way?” So then we found on the internet that there was [sic] provincial programs, so we looked at the different provinces...” (interviewee MN 13: 25). It was also seen as less expensive, “the federal streams are really expensive. You need a certain amount of money” (interviewees MN 6 and 7: 780).

Others weighed economic and lifestyle issues: “We looked at housing prices...and it seems like Alberta was a bit too expensive, BC had the same climate as England...Saskatchewan...wasn’t enough there for me...and we didn’t want to go to Ontario because it was just too busy, so we ended up choosing Manitoba” (interviewee MN 3: 395-410). In the BC case, interviewees attributed the personal attention and assistance they received with their nominee application as their main decision to apply through the BC-PNP (over the Skilled Worker Program):

for the Skilled Worker program, you have to interpret what that means and send your form off and hope you’re fine. With the PNP what we were able to do is put what we thought and then they checked or we could send an email saying “oh, on question 20...can you just explain what they mean by that,” and then somebody would come back to...us...so you had a little bit more information to help you, and I think that was the biggest thing out of the whole process that made it easier for us (interviewee BC 4: 397).

The fact that female interviewees chose from a range of economic immigration pathways underscored that gender roles were neither as limited nor as fixed as commonly assumed. For example, a professional woman from England, MN3, chose to move to Manitoba to work as a wife and mother (see Piper and Roces 2003 for more on this migration pattern). This particular interviewee arrived in Steinbach through the Employer Direct stream. She came on an open visa (entitling her to work at any job) whereas her husband’s was limited to a closed visa, i.e., he had to work for a trucking company that had agreed to hire him. In her words, “I had a very high paid job in the UK and my husband did too, but we decided to trade the money for better lifestyle for our family” (interviewee MN 3: 40) She had

intended to immigrate to Canada, have more children and work in the home, but this did not pan out. “Sadly, the person who offered my husband employed had lied about his salary three times...so I was forced to go to work, which to be honest I used to make like \$55 an hour in England, so to have to come to work for 20% when I wasn’t supposed to work was frustrating” (interviewee MN 3: 60). “And so you don’t get as much money and you have to go to work and that’s not what the plan was.” MN3 had been a manager in a telecommunications company responsible for over 7000 employees in England, but her first job in Manitoba was at a local video store. MN 3 eventually obtained employment in an immigrant centre.

Not only do we see women’s more diverse economic migration paths and choices and the fact that “some women cross international borders in their own right as autonomous economic migrants with ‘international expertise’ as opposed to being accompanying spouses” (Yeoh and Khoo 1998: 162), but also, in some cases, they are the ones who arrive with the guarantee of “good” jobs, and it is their spouses, usually male, who have a more difficult time with economic and social integration and need to settle for “bad jobs” and/or to “reinvent” themselves. Here, then, men are, uncharacteristically, the “dependants” in question.

Consider here two interviewees in British Columbia (interviewee BC 3 & 4), a female nurse and her male spouse who emigrated from England. The female interviewee acknowledged that she was the one who had the good fortune of “coming to a job that you want to come to” as a nurse in the BC-PNP, and it was also her understanding that: “whereas if you come under the Skilled Worker program, you have to accept you may have to do something totally different short term...we know this case, he was an IT guy and he wanted the salary that he got in England. Well he’s never going to get that here. Absolutely no way” (interviewee BC 3: 447) This necessity to “settle” for less pay, or for work that was not commensurate with qualifications, was the experience of her spouse who had been a manager in England for an international department chain, and then a small business owner. Yet, his first job in Nanaimo was that of a part-time sales clerk: “I went to work and it was three days a week. That was \$8 an hour. It didn’t even cover the gas to get there, but I did it because I thought it was important to get into a work environment...And I did also yes do some voluntary work. ...But again to just sort of start putting on your resume that you have Canadian work experience.” He considered this to be “alright because I didn’t mind it. I was in men’s wear and we had a good laugh and it was a good team, a good staff...Yeah, it was fine. But towards the end of it I was getting a bit tired of being nice to all the customers and folding the clothes” (interviewee BC 4: 471-486).

Obviously, gender, race, ethnicity and class also intersect in these processes, and thus the experiences of a white woman from England will differ from those of a racialized woman from the Philippines, despite the fact that both are educated and skilled professionals. In general, “immigrants from South Asia....cluster in low-wage occupations, other immigrants, such as those from, Britain, Germany, and Italy, enjoy relatively high performance levels in the Canadian labor market (Bauder 2006: 58). As a result, the most dramatic fluctuations in women’s class positions across both space and time were typically the result of intersecting forms of gender and racial discrimination.

Nevertheless, the larger point being made here is that immigrant women's economic roles, overall, are more varied than is commonly assumed, and that their gender and class positions are neither limited nor static. Immigrant women are much more than "dependants" or "trailing spouses" and their "decisions to migrate and experiences while abroad also need to be considered at the micro-level of the household" (Yeoh and Khoo 1998: 161). By doing so it becomes evident that the choices made by the women in question reflect that they are neither individualistic, entrepreneurial, neoliberal subjects, nor are they simply victims of global capitalism.

To illustrate, while PAs in the NSNP economic category were predominately male, there were also women in this stream (with the ratios of women to men incrementally growing over time; see Office of Immigration 2009). Moreover, most of the women "dependants" were also well educated professionals in their countries of origin who could have applied as principal applicants but strategically decided it would be better for their husbands to do so. For some, it was a question of deciding who had the better English language facility, and for others, it was more of an economic and familial balancing act. One female interviewee who had come as a dependant but had previously managed her own international trade business in the Philippines described how: "when we decided to come here...we also decided to close the business in preparation for coming here as a family" (interviewee NS 18: 55). In the end, she stayed in NS while her husband returned to the Philippines: "In our case, my husband believed that there's nothing for him here, but he respects my individuality as a person who would, would adjust to the life of an immigrant, let's put it that way. So, I'm more cut out for immigration...we'll make the best out of the situation...So, what we decided to do was go through the emotional costs of it" (interviewee NS 18: 95-100). In this case, as in most others, a key deciding factor was improving the long term prospects for children and families.

In general, nominees weighed various options factoring in economic considerations, but mostly basing their migration decisions on social concerns revolving around familial safety and security, and enhancing children's education and their future prospects. For example, one Manitoban interviewee (from England) described wanting to migrate due to "crime and just feeling that your children just aren't really safe to venture off and stuff. And the economy as well-like the housing market was just going down and we had just kind of figured in so many years down the line, it just wasn't a good place. Thinking future wise especially for our children" (interviewee MN4: 75). In her case, Steinbach was chosen over Winnipeg, "because "I thought this looks like a really safe, nice place for my little boy to grow up and so we ended up just buying a house here" (interviewee MN 3: 115). She also provided a concrete example of the small town safety she cherished, "things like I left my purse in a shopping cart...I had left Christmas presents in the cart as well, and they took them into the store, they looked through them, they found my name on the receipt, called us in the book. That doesn't happen anywhere else" (interviewee MN 3: 690).

Later this interviewee added: "The work side is the downside and that's the trade-off we have to make...we live in a really nice community, it's really safe for my little boy, and one of the big things that I think about a lot is I think about my son's future. And in England everything is just about money, money, money....And I don't want him to be stuck in a job where it's just because he's got to bring the dollar home. I want him to do something that he loves, and I think he has way more opportunity to do that in

this country than he does in mine” (interviewee MN 3: 190-195). This, then, provides a marked contrast to the neoliberal “ideal” of the individualistic, entrepreneur.

Similarly, a woman of Filipino-origin who had previously worked in Los Angeles noted that in her smaller Manitoban locale “it’s more like being a peaceful town...one of the reasons why I left L.A. was ...the gangs..... I mean even up to the point where policemen are afraid of them, and I just didn’t want my kids growing up in that kind of environment” (interviewee MN 7: 480). Safety and education of children were repeatedly pinpointed as primary motivations. The view was that, by living in Manitoba, children “didn’t experience the hardship that we had in the Philippines and they don’t value education so much [in the Philippines as in Canada], so that’s what we tell them: you know what, we came here and we don’t want you to end up not caring for [your] future...So as much as possible, we direct them; I mean guide them to go to university” (interviewee MN 7, 495).

NS interviewees echoed these sentiments. Nova Scotia was consistently perceived to be a “safe and quiet” place (interviewee NS 4: 110). Safety, security and freedom were identified as its most desirable features, followed by the positive perception of Nova Scotia’s educational opportunities for whole families (interviewee NS7: 185; interviewee NS 5: 5). Last but not least, various perceptions of gender equality were also apparent in several nominees’ decision making processes. Some suggested that their decision to leave their countries of origin was tied to restrictions placed on the mobility of women, others explicitly referred to more equitable gender relations in Canada.

Ironically, nominees repeatedly articulated Canada’s purported equality and diversity as one of the bases for their migration decision, but then, when here, they experienced a disconnect between these ideals and their realities (Bryan 2011). Consider this description of one nominee’s experience in rural Manitoba: “Well, most of the time the women can’t get work here, they just can’t get jobs because it’s really clique-y here, and though they’re not supposed to in an interview, they’ll still ask you which church you go to, and if you don’t give them the right answer, you haven’t got a chance. And you know, they’re like- they want to know who you are and they’ll give the job to a relative before they’ll ever give it to you, and that happens a lot.” (interviewee MN3: 240).

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing multi-pronged meso and micro analyses serve to contextualize and complicate immigrant women’s economic migration experiences and contest dominant macro narratives. The case of BC nominees provides a stark contrast to those of NS, for example. Yet, despite their significant differences (depending both on the identities of the women involved and on the province in question), what they share is that their stories are not ones of unqualified “success”, nor do they reflect women as simply “victims” of neoliberal forces at global, national or local scales. These accounts offer a counter-narrative to immigrant women as “dependants” or individualistic entrepreneur “ideal migrants” (Barber 2008). Here we see the strategic construction and manipulation of material circumstances and identities in ways that disrupt gender and class norms as well as dominant neoliberal expectations, and reveal women’s agency. Women, both principal applicants and dependants, were determined to seize and shape political opportunities. Interviewees tactically chose between different immigration options at

different scales, federal and provincial, and between provinces, and their migration rationales, overall, were multi-faceted. Typically, familial considerations were at the forefront. In particular, safety, security, and educational opportunities, interwoven with gendered rationales, loomed as large motivational factors.

Thus, by highlighting immigrant women's strategic rationales and considering their agency in contexts of both opportunity and constraint, this paper underscores immigrant women's **multiple economic identities that change**, and that can **challenge, sometimes even disrupt and counter, leading neoliberal and migration narratives**.

In closing, this paper clearly shows that we need to counter the invisibilization of immigrant women by considering their perceptions based on lived experiences and by using their insights to inform governmental practices. It is also important to remember that while there are obviously real costs (material, physical and emotional) at stake, there are also benefits involved, some for the immigrant women, but mostly for Canadian society at large, that are often obscured or typically taken for granted.

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